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Security Council

Seventy-first year

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Tuesday, 15 March 2016, 10.10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/218)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2016/218)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Sweden and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/218, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Haysom.

Mr. Haysom: In 2016, Afghanistan is being as severely tested as it was in 2015, by the task of managing its difficult transition, with its interrelated political, economic and security challenges. To survive 2016, the National Unity Government will need to overcome five distinct hurdles, namely, a contracting economy characterized by low growth and high unemployment; an intensifying insurgency, regarded by some as an eroding stalemate; and an increasingly fractuos and divided political environment. In addition, Afghanistan will need to secure significant medium-term financial support from the international community at the Warsaw and Brussels conferences this summer. Finally, it will need to achieve progress towards sustainable peace, without which all the other gains will be threatened. For 2016, survival will be an achievement for the National Unity Government. Some may criticize that benchmark as being low. Yet Afghanistan must overcome each and every one of those five hurdles to avoid severe consequences. Survival cannot mean inaction or treading water; it means active engagement in confronting those challenges.

On the economic situation, we acknowledge that there was a failure to appreciate the shock of the withdrawal of the international community at the end of 2014. In 2012, decisions on the future of Afghanistan assumed the continuation of an annual growth rate of 8 per cent and that the exploitation of Afghanistan's abundant mineral resources would drive economic development. It is now clear, however, that neither would occur. The World Bank now expects low economic growth, off a low base. In addition, the latest weather forecast suggest that some areas of the country may be affected by drought this summer, thereby increasing Afghanistan's humanitarian vulnerabilities. Low levels of growth have resulted in high unemployment. The hundreds of thousands of young people who seek to join the work force each year confront the absence of jobs and complain of corruption in public and private life. That combination fuels not only the impulse to migrate, but also lays a foundation for social volatility.

However, that picture is mitigated by the Government's effort to implement its reform agenda, as articulated in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, to create jobs. In 2015, the Government met the International Monetary Fund goals under the recently concluded staff-monitored programme, as well as domestic revenue-collection targets. It avoided the liquidity crisis it faced in 2014. And the Government has now stated its clear intention and taken preliminary steps towards putting an end to the pervasive culture of graft in the armed forces, the civil service, the banking sector and in public sector procurement. The Government's engagement with it neighbours, bilaterally and through initiatives such as the Heart of Asia Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, for the purpose of regional economic integration has begun to bear fruit, inter alia, with the launch of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project. Those are encouraging, but only first, steps in a long road towards self-reliance.

With regard to the security situation, we can expect a difficult fighting season. The Taliban, emboldened by their military successes in Kunduz and elsewhere, will continue to test the Afghan security forces across the country, including as we speak, from Helmand in the south, to Baghlan province in the north. Yet in this first year of independent command, the Afghan security forces have largely held their own in the face of continuing high rates of attrition.

The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are undertaking efforts to adapt and improve. They are absorbing the lessons from Kunduz and elsewhere, including, we hope, as they relate to the use of armed militias. They are reconstituting their front-line units and concentrating their otherwise thinly spread presence in the field in order to adopt a more offensive operational posture to prevent insurgents from gaining momentum in advance of the fighting season. The stakes are high, not least because the loss of a provincial capital, even if temporarily, will have significant repercussions for the political standing of the National Unity Government. On a positive note, since my last briefing (see S/PV.7591), the active presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh has been confined to a small area in the east of the country, following operations by Afghan security forces, with international military support.

With regard to the political transition, the National Unity Government continues to be subject of criticism on account of the economic and security deterioration, although that is not of its own making. It is being challenged by a fractious political elite and the erosion of a necessary sense of national unity — and, consequentially, that most precious political commodity, confidence in the future. In the face of calls for reviewing the current political framework, the United Nations and the international community have made it clear to all stakeholders that they stand firmly behind the National Unity Government. We can even positively report that, despite delays in effective decision-making, the Government has now appointed an Attorney General and a Minister of Interior. A number of key posts, however, remain to be filled.

Electoral reform is important for the National Unity Government to indicate manifest progress in democratization and to fulfil the commitments it made to the population in 2014.

The announcement of a 15 October election date has brought some clarity, but for there to be real progress, what is required is the introduction of electoral reforms and the standing-up of the election management bodies. The United Nations has made it clear that it expects Afghans to take these decisions expeditiously and on the basis of the broadest consensus. We can report that, only this week, the Government finally issued a decree establishing a new selection committee to nominate independent election commissioners. Yet the urgency to complete preparations remains, and the failure to undertake these preparations will have political consequences.

In the coming months, the international community will make critical decisions at Warsaw and Brussels on the level and type of assistance that it will continue to provide to Afghanistan. As the country continues to rely on external funding sources for 69 per cent of Government expenditures, failure by the international community to pledge a medium-term commitment to Afghanistan will have a devastating impact both materially and on the levels of confidence of ordinary Afghans.

Because of alternative demands for international attention and resources, donors will need to be assured that their assistance will have a tangible impact. Afghanistan must show, in particular, that it is committed to tackling corruption, making the necessary governance reforms, addressing the illicit economy and generating confidence in Afghanistan's future. Investment in Afghanistan's must be shown to be a better alternative to the costs of integrating immigrants. However, donor expectations of Afghanistan's reform agenda must be realistic, taking into account the formidable challenges facing the country. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) itself will assist donors and the Government in formulating a joint consensus on this programme. The final hurdle is progress towards a sustainable peace. Afghans want peace, they deserve peace, but most importantly they need peace. Without a peace process, the sustainability and viability of all our efforts in Brussels, Warsaw, New York, and elsewhere to bring stability and prosperity to Afghanistan will be called into question.

The establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group is a welcome development that has reinvigorated efforts to put a peace process on track. We notably appreciate the efforts of Pakistan to assist in midwifing such talks. A successful peace process will require the support of neighbouring countries and the wider region.

As such, and with the increasing regional dimension of terrorism, it will be important for countries of the region to collaborate on a common approach to the shared threat as well as to act in support of Afghanistan's peace initiatives.

We have called repeatedly and we will continue to call for nothing less than direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan Government. I again met with the Taliban Political Commission last week and reiterated that peace in Afghanistan requires an intra-Afghan dialogue that must, by necessity, involve the Taliban and Taliban groups. However, they reiterated that they were not yet ready to engage directly with the Government. The United Nations will continue to energetically engage with all stakeholders offering support, assistance, advice, good offices and supplementary channels of communications. Whatever the eventual path forward, the United Nations will also encourage the participation of women in any peace process so as to ensure that women's voices are heard and that their rights are protected.

Some 11,000 civilian Afghans were killed or injured last year as a result of the conflict. A quarter of these victims were children. We are conscious that behind this figure lies the tragic loss and grief of surviving members of families and communities. It is no longer sufficient for parties to the conflict to make public statements on the need to avoid civilian casualties; they must change the way they conduct the war. The United Nations has recently expressed its concern at the disturbing pattern of attacks and raids on educational and medical facilities, in contravention of international humanitarian standards. We do, however, welcome the Government's renewed commitment and recent steps to prevent the recruitment of children by parties to the conflict.

UNAMA welcomes its refreshed mandate to be adopted by the Security Council today. We reassure the Council of our commitment to the ever more effective discharge of our mandate for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Haysom for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): I congratulate Angola on its successful leadership of the Security Council this month. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and for his outstanding leadership of the United Nations work in Afghanistan. I thank the Secretary-General for his recent report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2016/218), which offers a lucid overview of the situation prevailing in my country.

Since the Council's last deliberations on Afghanistan in December 2015 (see S/PV.7591), we have witnessed important gains in several key areas. Enhanced regional and global cooperation has brought renewed hope in our peace efforts with the armed groups. The sustainability and enabling needs of our security forces have received fresh attention, with good deliveries from regional and global partners. Our security forces have conducted large-scale operations and flushed out terrorists and extremists in several districts and villages across the country. Government inclusiveness and social outreach has improved political stability. The Government has met human rights benchmarks through multiple pieces of progressive legislation. Electoral reform is benefiting from fresh momentum. A number of key senior appointments has increased professionalism in governance. Measures to increase revenue mobilization have brought results. An increased rate in voluntary return of our nationals prove that more people are coming back to Afghanistan. In addition, there has been substantial reduction in opium cultivation and production. With the Afghan New Year just days away, these developments give hope for more promising times for us.

The renewal of UNAMA's mandate is another affirmation of the strong partnership between Afghanistan and the United Nations. On this occasion, we are grateful for the vital United Nations contributions to our security, development and rehabilitation. We welcome the reflection of the recommendations of the Tripartite Review Commission in the renewed mandate of UNAMA. Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi and his entire team for doing a fantastic job as the penholder of the UNAMA resolution to be adopted.

With preparations in progress for security, political and development discussions on Afghanistan at the forthcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw and the Brussels Conference, there are clear signs that Afghanistan is once again turning into a symbol of international cooperation, with the National Unity Government as a

trusted partner for all. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the international community over the coming years and are confident that our joint success in stabilizing the situation and achieving peace and prosperity is inevitable.

We continue to face challenges from the Taliban, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and other violent extremist and terrorist groups. Their human rights violations persisted during an unusual winter lull, resulting in high civilian casualty rates, massive internal displacement and increasing instability in different parts of the country. In the face of mounting struggles, Afghans have remained united in a commitment to thwart these groups.

Following last December's Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Islamabad and its side meetings, increased efforts have aimed at restoring peace talks. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States, has met four times in two months, in Islamabad and Kabul, and succeeded in finalizing the road map for the next steps forward. Moreover, in Afghanistan itself, the appointment of a new leadership team for the High Peace Council has reinvigorated the promotion of peace. We will spare no effort to grant our citizens their fundamental right to live peaceful and dignified lives.

Despite those important developments, we are cognizant of the challenges ahead of us. So far, the call of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group for peace talks has received mixed reactions. Some groups have expressed readiness to attend the talks, some are weighing their options and some are attempting to raise the stakes. Two weeks ago, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Ministry adviser to Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, publicly stated that his Government had influence on the Taliban because its leadership, together with their families, lived in Pakistan. Mr. Aziz's statement speaks volumes about the crucial need for Pakistan to play its role in helping to facilitate direct talks between authorized representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan Government. We repeat our call to the Taliban to engage in the peace talks and give up violence. We assure them that they will be among the first beneficiaries of the peace dividend. At the same time, let me make it clear in no uncertain terms that those elements that choose the path of violence and terror will face the full might of our security forces and will be held accountable, no matter whose protection they enjoy.

We welcome the growing voice of reason within Pakistan calling for a change in the right direction. In the light of that, we want an immediate end to regular incursions around the Durand Line, which cannot, and will not, be tolerated by Afghanistan. In the past three months alone, we have documented at least 56 instances of violation to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan across the Durand Line, in breach of Article 24, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations and contrary to resolution 2131 (2013). That jeopardizes Afghanistan-Pakistan relations at a time when making peace with Pakistan is essential to making peace with the Taliban.

Despite our high ambitions and political will, we have realistic expectations from the peace process. Success depends on a number of factors at the national, regional and international levels, including the adequate handling of the spoilers of peace. At the national level, violence must decrease so that we can win the confidence of our people, especially women, in the process. Ultimately, the peace process should further unite Afghans, rather than divide us. Every effort must be made to eliminate those elements of the armed groups that oppose peace. We anticipate clear and decisive steps towards that objective. At the regional and international levels, we should aim at minimizing negative State rivalries and maximizing cooperation. States have the right to be concerned about their interests. However, they do not have the right to pursue them through violent means and proxies in others' territories. The price of greatness to regional and global powers is responsibility and better cooperation in the legitimate interests of all. Given its sensitive geostrategic location and its history of turmoil, as well as the fact of being embroiled in global violent extremism and terrorism, Afghanistan must continue to remain a symbol of international cooperation.

While we deliberate here today, terrorists and violent extremist groups, including Da'esh and Al-Qaida, continue to threaten the foundations of our society. Everything we cherish — equality, democracy, justice and human rights — is under attack from the daily onslaught of violence. We are in a constant battle between legality and illegality, civilization and darkness. For our part, we will continue our more than two decades-long struggle against the menace of terrorism. We will do so as a matter of national and strategic priority. Moreover, ridding Afghanistan, our region and beyond from this menace demands more

robust efforts regionally and globally by all States, particularly those in which extremist groups originate.

The time is now to strengthen the overall international architecture against terrorism. Afghanistan has long advocated the conclusion of the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. As we struggle to reach a common definition of terrorism, we must remind ourselves of the enormous pain and suffering that extremism inflicts on the civilized world. Think about the loved ones of the 146 people who either lost their lives or were wounded in the terrorist attacks of the past couple of days in Ankara and Côte d'Ivoire. The Council should ensure that all States meet their international obligations with respect to the implementation of the relevant counter-terrorism and sanctions regime resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, in particular resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2253 (2015) and 2255 (2015), and present genuine and regular compliance reports.

While we press for the success of the peace process, Afghanistan must be able to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to protect is citizens. While we agree that there is no military solution to the security problems imposed on us, we firmly believe that, without an effective defence and security system, there will be no solution. In the past three months, despite limited resources, the initiative has very much remained in the hands of our security forces. They have had success in a number of provinces, including Nangarhar, Baghland, Helmand, Badakhshan, Takhar and Faryab. In Helmand, our forces have repelled sizeable enemy attacks, despite sustaining heavy casualties. However, the cost of war imposed upon us is massive, and way beyond our own capacity. Sustainability, proper training, the right enablers, reform and high morale among the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are crucial in facing the regional and global terror threat. Lately, the United States, India, China and the Russian Federation have contributed to the delivery of the right enablers to the ANDSF. We look forward to the NATO Warsaw Summit in July, where the long-term sustainability of the ANDSF will be discussed.

Afghanistan continues to make strides in civilian protection and the promotion of human rights, especially protecting the rights of our children, which has always been our priority. We will continue to implement the road map to compliance to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers, having already endorsed the national age assessment guidelines, to ensure we bring an end to practices that put the lives and future of our children at risk. The recent Afghanistan visit of Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, provided an excellent opportunity for a first-hand assessment of the situation. Our pledge to empower women and ensure their equal rights is bearing fruit. Multiple Government initiatives continue to encourage women's participation in all sectors, while the strengthening of existing laws on violence against women help to create a just society. In the past three months, we have witnessed multiple attacks on civilians, including the slaying of a journalist of a populat television network. Following that incident, President Ghani affirmed his commitment to the freedom of expression by issuing a decree to prevent the intimidation.

There is significant political will to consolidate the progress made in the past years. However, the high price paid by Afghans due to the imposed conflict pulls us in a downward spiral. The Council must note that our Government's policy is to protect civilians at any cost. The Afghan National Security Forces operate under strict rules of engagement based on principles of justifiability and proportionality. They provide compensation and support to victims of violence, and never use any civilian facilities for military purposes.

Afghanistan is currently suffering a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. The number of internally displaced people is at its highest since 2002, but the rate of voluntary returns under the repatriation programme has seen a significant increase since 2014. However, the continuous flow of Afghans out of the country is a source of concern, as they contribute to the migrant crisis in Europe, constituting the second largest group of arrivals via the Mediterranean Sea route. Compounding the crisis, several European countries have started rejecting Afghan asylum petitions. It is our Government's policy to improve conditions in Afghanistan so that we can create economic opportunities and strengthen security to incentivize people to stay and contribute to their nation. We call upon our friends from the international community to work with us in achieving this goal.

Countering the menace of the narcotics trade and breaking down the nexus of criminality and drugs are key priorities for us. Our success is evident from the findings of the *Afghanistan Drug Report 2015*, which emphasizes significant reductions in opium cultivation and production, and slight increases in drug seizures.

We will continue to work with the international community to garner support on the Afghan national drug action plan 2015-2019 to counter the threat of illicit drugs.

No country can achieve self-reliance without economic self-sufficiency, and Afghanistan has been adopting concrete measures to move in that direction. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, we are in the process of drafting a new national development strategy, the guiding document on strategies for security, governance, economic growth, poverty reduction and employment. We are serious in dealing with corruption because it negatively impacts economic growth. In that regard, the Government has implemented multiple anti-corruption strategies and has started programmes that would ensure transparency of recruitment in public service and prevent nepotism.

In October 2016, the ministerial conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Brussels, is expected to convey a message of strong political support for our reform and State-building process, to commit development assistance in support of Afghanistan's reform process within an updated mutual accountability framework, and to create a political momentum of reinforced regional cooperation. We invite Member States to take an active part in this conference, as investing in Afghan stability would create safety dividends worldwide.

The President: Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/241, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Spain.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2274 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, and his team for their splendid work. I also thank Ambassador Saikal. It has been a true pleasure for the Spanish delegation to work with the Afghan Mission.

We have just adopted resolution 2274 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for one more year, in keeping with the desires of the Afghan Government and in consultation with it. The members of the Council are aware of the new era that began a year ago with the transformation decade, and acknowledge the progressive efforts that have been undertaken in Afghanistan. By way of this new resolution, the Council underscores these extremes and expresses its desire to continue to support the Government and people of Afghanistan on their path of reform, progress, internal reconciliation and regional and global integration.

My delegation subscribes to the statement that will be made later by the observer of the European Union. Notwithstanding my capacity as penholder of the Council, I should like to briefly take stock of the resolution we have just adopted.

First, I would like to refer to the Tripartite Review Commission. As members will recall, in response to a series of concerns expressed by Afghanistan, one year ago the Security Council, through resolution 2210 (2015), mandated a commission that included the Afghan Government, United Nations and the donor community, to consider the role, structure and activities of the United Nations in the country. During our discussions on Afghanistan last September (S/PV.7526), we took note of the document containing the recommendations resulting from that review (see S/2015/713). In the resolution adopted today, the Council took account of those recommendations in a pre-eminent manner by renewing the mandate of UNAMA. In that regard, we stress the importance of Afghan leadership and ownership that underlay the exercise, and of strengthening the legitimacy of UNAMA. Without attempting to be exhaustive, I should like to highlight some of the references made in the outcome document of the Tripartite Review Commission.

First, reference was made to the ongoing good offices of the Mission, as well as to the need to emphasize the role of the United Nations in the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, including the rights of women

and gender equality, and in helping Afghanistan to meet its international commitments in this regard. Finally, the report referred to the importance of the humanitarian dimension of the United Nations, in particular as the facilitator of humanitarian access.

Secondly, the new resolution takes note of the most relevant measures adopted by the Afghan Government in the past year, and refers to the main challenges awaiting in the year to come. In that regard, the Council renews and reiterates its call on the international community to continue to support Afghanistan; expresses its firm support for the Government of National Unity and its reform agenda; and recalls the two significant meetings that will take place in 2016: the Warsaw NATO summit in July, and the ministerial conference to be convened jointly by Afghanistan and the European Union in Brussels on 4 and 5 October.

As was just mentioned by the Special Representative, the most recent report (S/2016/218) of the Secretary-General recalls the difficulties encountered by the Afghan Government in implementing its reform agenda, as well as the deterioration in the security situation despite the courageous and decisive actions of the Afghan security forces throughout the territory of the country. We are particularly concerned by the ongoing increase in the number of security incidents and the number of civilian victims of the conflict. We are concerned by the situation of children, with regard to which the Government recently adopted significant legislative measures. We are concerned by the express threat by the Taliban against the press, the media and humanitarian workers. And we are concerned by the increase in what the report calls high-profile attacks, such as what happened in December in Spain's Embassy in Kabul, which took the lives of two Spanish police and five Afghan civilians.

My delegation reiterates Spain's support to Afghanistan in meeting all those challenges, as well as in implementing its agenda for reform and in its process of regional economic integration. Similarly, we would like to express our desire that the electoral process announced for this year will make it possible to strengthen Afghan democracy and make further progress along the path towards political and social stability.

Thirdly, I would like to highlight the renewed efforts of the Afghan Government in recent months, with the support of the United States, China and Pakistan through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, to make progress in the peace process. In today's resolution, the Security Council expresses its decisive support for those efforts. We trust that soon the efforts undertaken by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group will lead, in line with the road map that has been developed, to direct peace talks between the Afghan Government and the representatives who are authorized to represent the Taliban, in order to work towards a cessation of hostilities and towards lasting peace. We encourage all those relevant actors to persevere in their efforts to make that possible.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating Spain's conviction that the international community's commitment to Afghanistan will be maintained, as will all of our desires to continue supporting the country, its institutions and its citizens.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom for his update and his hard work over recent months. I also thank Ambassador Saikal for his comments this morning.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) remains a critical asset for the Security Council and the Afghan Government. We look forward to ensuring that its comprehensive range of support continues. Today I would like to briefly touch on three key areas, namely, the ongoing toll on the civilian population, actions that must be taken to ensure economic and political progress, and the importance of the Council's action to renew the mandate of UNAMA, which continues to play a critical role in guiding the Government through this difficult period.

The briefing of Special Representative Haysom once again underscored the fact that this conflict continues to exact a significant toll on the civilian population. The year 2015 was especially difficult, with anti-Government elements' brutal tactics and the use of indiscriminate violence pushing the number of civilian casualties to record-setting levels. Hundreds of thousands of able-bodied citizens have fled the troubled nation to seek asylum elsewhere. We encourage the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to continue to develop its operational capacity and do its best to limit civilian casualties.

As the Special Representative also noted, perhaps none have endured more suffering than the most vulnerable Afghans — children — who sadly comprised

a significant number of last year's casualties and who continue to be exploited by anti-Government elements.

As the security of Afghanistan is so closely linked to the nation's economic and political stability and progress, the international community must continue to provide its full support to the Afghan Government to deliver on its ambitious reform agenda, led by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah.

Governance and development remain critical elements for stability and progress; therefore, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue to fill key leadership positions in Government, follow through on its Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework reform commitments and make progress towards electoral reform. We welcome the recommendations announced by the Special Electoral Reform Commission, as they represent an important step in strengthening public confidence in the electoral process and in democratic institutions.

We continue to believe that outreach from the Government to all major segments of society is critical, as those who feel excluded are more likely to undermine the National Unity Government and foster greater instability. Accordingly, we commend and strongly support the Afghan Government's efforts to foster a peace and reconciliation process with the Taliban and other armed groups. Moreover, we welcome the support from regional partners to advance this Afghan-led and Afghan-owned initiative. We will continue to work through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to do our part to advance the peace process.

On the economic front, we welcome President Ghani's efforts to increase regional connectivity. We also commend the Government for its significantly increased revenue collection in 2015. Slow economic growth remains a serious concern, and we encourage the Government to take steps to improve the investment climate for both foreign and domestic businesses.

In 2016, the international community will have an opportunity to renew security and development assistance for Afghanistan at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit in Warsaw in July and at the Brussels ministerial meeting on development in October. We encourage nations to sustain their commitments for financial and security assistance through the transformation decade.

I would like to conclude with a few words about the importance of UNAMA. We agree with the Tripartite Review Commission's assessment that Afghanistan continues to demand significant international assistance; it is essential for the country to achieve political and economic stability and security. UNAMA is representative of our common resolve to be Afghanistan's partner. With the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, the Council will once again demonstrate its collective commitment to Afghanistan and to the Afghan people.

We thank Special Representative Haysom again and reaffirm our support for his ongoing efforts to ensure UNAMA effectively discharges its mandate, namely, exercising good offices, promoting human rights and the rule of law, coordinating humanitarian assistance and donor support, and countering narcotics.

In the face of tremendous obstacles, the Afghan Government has made great strides towards its stated goals; however, there is much work to be done. The Government's continued focus on the tasks ahead remains imperative. The international community must continue to buttress Afghanistan's efforts with technical, financial and moral support.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom for his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We listened with interest to the substantive statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal.

The developments in the military and political situation in Afghanistan are a matter of serious concern. There has recently been a significant increase in militant activity by the Taliban, as well as other terrorist groups. One very worrying subject is the increase in the numbers and influence of Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan and the latter's efforts to subsume other opposition armed groups, primarily in the north of the country. We have noted with concern the cases of assaults and terrorist attacks on diplomatic missions of foreign Governments in Afghanistan, which recently have become more frequent. We are compelled to conclude that the activities of the four-nation contact group created a few months ago to establish direct talks between Kabul and the Taliban unfortunately has not produced visible results. A clear indication of this was the Taliban's statement about its refusal to resume

peace negotiations until the Afghan Government meets its previously announced preconditions, and in that case there can be no possibility of starting a successful peace process. But without full-fledged peace talks and an end to military action, the suffering of the Afghan people will continue.

For our part, we support the Afghan Government's policy regarding the achievement of national reconciliation. We are ready to help to advance the negotiation process, including by demonstrating a flexible approach to the issues related to the functioning of the sanctions regime on the Taliban of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). We are ready to build a constructive partnership with the Afghan leadership in the interests of maintaining the country's stability and independent path, free of terrorism and drug trafficking. In our view, a key to stability in Afghanistan is the combat-ready national security forces, which must be able to independently ensure peace and stability in their country.

In February, we shipped supplies of weapons and munitions — 10,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles and more than 2 million cartridges — to Afghanistan free of charge. We will continue to help Kabul to prepare and train Afghan security personnel in cooperation with the relevant Russian authorities, both on a bilateral basis and by cooperating with our international partners, regardless of the change in position on the part of the United States, NATO and a number of Western countries regarding their implementation of joint projects with Russia aimed at assisting Afghanistan.

We consider NATO's ongoing Resolute Support Mission to be a direct successor to the International Security Assistance Force, which was unable to complete the tasks it had been set over a 12-year period from 2002 to 2014. Nonetheless, we supported the Security Council's adoption, in December 2014, of resolution 2189 (2014), on the launch of the Resolute Support Mission, on the assumption that the NATO leaders would continue to report to the Security Council on their Mission's activities regarding the situation in Afghanistan. In view of the results of the NATO Summit in Wales and Kabul's signing of agreements on security with Washington, D.C., and with NATO on the status of forces, the Alliance and the United States, as the main supplier of troops to NATO's Afghan mission, now bears greater responsibility for training the Afghan national security forces and for the development of the security situation in Afghanistan. It is also crucial that no security threats to third countries emanate from Afghanistan. We are compelled to conclude that so far the new NATO mission has not achieved its stated goals either. Units of the Afghan national security forces have sustained significant losses in fighting the opposition and have shown an inability to effectively repel their onslaught.

The drugs being produced in large quantities in Afghanistan pose a serious threat to its own stability and to that of the surrounding region and the world in general. Besides the direct harm it inflicts, the production of drugs provides terrorism with significant financial fuel. In that regard, we believe it is essential to intensify the international community's efforts to combat drug-trafficking in Afghanistan. We have no illusions about the data published in 2015 showing a significant drop in opium production in Afghanistan, and we attribute those numbers to a change in the methodology for assessing the level of drug production.

We note the growing awareness around the world of the importance of the regional context to reaching a settlement in Afghanistan, and of increasing the number of regional forums focused on the issue of Afghanistan. We also believe it is important to ensure that regional actors play a decisive role in such activities. In that context, we have some doubts about the Istanbul Process, also known as the Heart of Asia. We believe that it is merely a platform for dialogue aimed at generating new ideas that should not be duplicating the work of existing regional organizations.

We believe that efforts to assist Afghanistan should chiefly consist of promoting the work of established structures, primarily the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), whose members, observers and dialogue partners include almost all the countries in the region, including Afghanistan. We welcome Afghanistan's official application for membership status in the SCO, submitted by President Ghani during his meeting with President Putin on the margins of the SCO summit in Ufa. We see excellent potential in strengthening counter-terrorist and anti-drug interaction between Afghanistan, the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to thank Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his useful and detailed briefing. We

would also like to express our appreciation to the Spanish delegation for its efforts in the drafting and adoption of today's resolution 2274 (2016), on extending the work and mandate of UNAMA. Egypt welcomes the Council's unanimity on this important resolution, and always emphasizes the crucial role played by the Security Council and UNAMA.

The regions of Central Asia and the Middle East share interlinked interests and stability factors. Egypt has therefore always kept a watchful eye on the Afghan Government and supported it in its fight against terrorism and in its strenuous efforts to establish its control and sovereignty over the whole of the country. We support the Afghan authorities in their political and social efforts to entrench security and ensure the development and prosperity of the entire Afghan people. We would like to stress the risk that the illicit trade in drugs poses to stability and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole. In that regard, we would like to emphasize the importance of close coordination, regionally and internationally, with the Afghan authorities, in combating trafficking in narcotics, an effort that cannot be separated from counter-terrorism action, owing to the fact that drugs are one of the principal sources of financing for terrorist groups and armed groups. In that regard, we can only welcome the efforts of the the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as well as those of the regional organizations working in this area to help Afghanistan solve this problem, which is so damaging to efforts to promote development and peace in Central Asia.

Where the United Nations is concerned, and taking into consideration the Secretary-General's September report on Afghanistan (S/2015/684), the General Assembly's most recent resolution on the situation in Afghanistan, issued in December (resolution 70/77) and the resolution adopted by the Security Council today, the international community is raising the alarm about the growing presence of Da'esh inside Afghanistan and its increasing control and capacities in the eastern part of the country. This is a cancerous tumour that we must confront, fight and uproot wherever it appears, both through our international Organization and in our anti-terrorism efforts. In that context, Egypt reiterates its continued willingness to help to train the Afghan army and police at specialized high-level sessions. We would also like to emphasize that we have no involvement in any internal Afghan struggles and no interests at stake except that of helping to ensure security and stability in the entire Afghan region by assisting the country's national army and its fight against the various terrorist organizations. We therefore hope to be able to work to ensure tripartite coordination in this vital area, as well as sufficient financing from donors to cover the costs of these specialized training sessions.

The Arab Republic of Egypt welcomes regional initiatives in this field, particularly the final declaration, entitled "Enhanced Cooperation for Countering Security Threats and Promoting Connectivity in the Heart of Asia Region", issued at the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process, held on 9 December 2015 in Islamabad. At the international level, we reiterate the importance of addressing the issue of Afghanistan in the appropriate forums, especially the European Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 4 and 5 October in Brussels.

Finally, Egypt is closely monitoring developments in the political and military situations in Afghanistan in order to achieve the shared goal of enhancing the capacities of a State that has suffered too much over the past few decades and to help it meet the challenges it faces in the areas of peace, stability, security and sustainable development.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I join earlier speakers in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, for his statement.

As Afghanistan completes the first year of the transformation decade, Malaysia is pleased to witness the steadfast commitment and ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government in implementing its reform agenda, particularly in the areas of security, economy, governance and development, as outlined in the document "Realizing self-realization: commitments to reform and renewed partnership". We are also pleased to note the increasingly positive atmosphere in the region in support of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. In that context, Malaysia welcomes the establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, and its adoption of a road map outlining steps towards a peace process. We reiterate that a peaceful political settlement is the only way to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the country, and hope for the early holding of direct

peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

Malaysia has always maintained the importance of the international community's ongoing support, encouragement and assistance to the Government of Afghanistan during these challenging times. In that respect, we are encouraged to note the various international and regional initiatives, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference for Afghanistan. We also look forward to the Warsaw summit and the ministerial-level development conference in Brussels, to be held in July and October, respectively. We are hopeful that this initiative will complement and assist the Afghan Government's reconstruction and development efforts. Nonetheless, we recognize that the Government continues to face significant challenges in its efforts to rebuild the country. Of particular concern is the dire security condition and its devastating impact on Afghan civilians.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/218), the 11,000 civilian casualties recorded last year represent the highest number of civilian casualties recorded since 2009. Unsurprisingly, children continue to suffer disproportionately as a result of the ongoing conflict, accounting for almost one-third of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict recently adopted its conclusions on the situation in Afghanistan, which delivered clear messages to all parties to the conflict and the international community on measures needed to safeguard the security and well-being of children in Afghanistan. Malaysia commends the Government's firm commitment to children's rights and protection, including by ending and preventing the recruitment of children within the Afghan National Police through the full implementation of its action plan and road map. We also commend the many positive measures already taken and strongly encourage continued progress on its implementation, especially with regard to the Afghan local police.

Yet many challenges and dangers remain for the country's youngest citizens, not least the grave threat to their lives. As many as 144 children were killed and 418 injured in the three months from November 2015 to January 2016. Schools and hospitals continue to be targets for attack, preventing crucial safe access to education and medical facilities. Non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups, continue to recruit children into their ranks through manipulation or coercion due to poverty. We are deeply concerned about this phenomenon and the resultant detention of children associated with such armed groups. In our view, it would be worthwhile considering alternative measures, such as rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, that would allow for the reinsertion of those children as productive members of the community, thereby reducing stigmatization.

The future of Afghanistan will one day rest in the hands of its children. Therefore, focusing on child protection during the ongoing conflict is a sound investment. The support of the international community is vital to this long-term endeavour, and we encourage continued cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, including the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as with bilateral and other multilateral partners in this regard.

Finally, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Haysom and the entire UNAMA team for their tireless efforts under challenging circumstances. We are convinced that the United Nations, in full respect for the principle of the country's sovereignty, will continue to play a decisive and contributing role towards realizing Afghanistan's transformation decade. I also wish to welcome the work of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan, which has provided us with valuable insights to further enhance the United Nations engagement with the Government of Afghanistan.

Given the critical moment that Afghanistan is going through and the importance of UNAMA's role, we favour the extension of the UNAMA mandate for 12 months. We are confident that, under its refocused and consolidated mandate, UNAMA will be able to assist the Afghan Government in meeting its aspirations towards achieving national unity and lasting stability. We also thank Spain for all its hard work that contributed to the unanimous adoption of resolution 2274 (2016) today.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating Malaysia's firm support for the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan in the context of respect for the country's democracy and Constitution, non-violence and the rights of all Afghans.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the delegation of Senegal, I welcome this opportunity to address the important issue of the situation in Afghanistan at a time when the country has just completed the first year of its transformation decade from 2015 to 2024, which my delegation fully supports. I thank the Spanish delegation for its efforts and Mr. Haysom for the high quality of the report that he has introduced (S/2016/218).

I also take this opportunity pay well-deserved tribute to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its outstanding work, often undertaken in difficult security conditions. My delegation voted in favour of resolution 2274 (2016), which the Security Council has adopted today with a view to extending the UNAMA mandate by one year.

I welcome and highlight the significant progress made thanks to the joint action of the Afghan Government, the NATO Resolute Support Mission, which took over from its International Security Assistance Force, the United Nations country team and other international actors. We should also pay tribute to all of Afghanistan's international partners, who continue to be committed for the sake of the country's stability and the security of its population. With regard to technical and financial partners and other generous donors, we urge them to pursue their efforts towards Afghanistan's reconstruction and development.

Afghanistan has made notable progress, in particular with the setting up of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, the steps taken with regard to the enrolment of children and combating drug trafficking, as well as the submission of the recommendations of the Special Commission on Electoral Reform. Nevertheless, sizable challenges continue to exist, including the deterioration in the security situation, in particular the heightened terrorist threat, as well as delays in implementing electoral reforms in the run-up to local and parliamentary elections, protecting human rights and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.

Developments in the security and political front remain of great concern, as witnessed by the recent statement by a Taliban faction to temporarily withdraw from talks, slowing a political process that is already facing difficulties. The intensity of the conflict and its spread continue to have an atrocious impact on civilians, especially on women and children. As noted in the report before us, the number of victims of the conflict in 2015 rose 4 per cent over the previous year. In 2015, more than 3,000 children lost their lives in Afghanistan, an increase of 14 per cent over 2014 and a sad toll unseen since 2009. And that is above and beyond difficulties in accessing humanitarian assistance and education, along with the recruitment of child soldiers and the existence of sexual abuse and other reprehensible acts, which my delegation of course condemns vehemently.

On the humanitarian front, the record number of internally displaced persons — 335,000 in 2015 — offsets the 58,463 persons returning voluntarily. A number of Afghan refugees — 213,000 people — are also headed for Europe, which represents the largest group after those coming from Syria. All of this serves to highlight the gravity of the challenges we face.

We welcome the work done by the Afghan Government, especially with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to protect children and improve their well-being. We call on all stakeholders to continue their efforts to help civilians. We would point out that protecting civilians in conflict is a responsibility that lies with the parties to a dispute, in line with international humanitarian law.

That leads me to stress the overriding need to carry out an inclusive peace process between the Government and the Taliban, with the support of the international community, in particular neighbouring countries. Senegal therefore welcomes the conclusion of the agreement between China, Pakistan, the United States and Afghanistan to establish the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which is the format chosen to support the peace talks. In that connection, allow me to welcome the regional momentum generated by Afghanistan, neighbouring countries and international partners that enabled the holding, in Islamabad on 9 December 2015, of the fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Process as well as the seventeenth meeting of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, held in Berlin on 3 February 2016, and which also led to the joint declaration adopted by Iran and Afghanistan early this year. The willingness expressed by Afghanistan and Pakistan to step up their cooperation on border security, trade and fighting terrorism continues to be commendable, as its contribution to achieving peace with the Taliban remains decisive.

Given the complexity of the peace process and the time it will take, it will be necessary to ensure the ongoing presence of international forces to pursue the efforts under way to strengthen the capacities of the Afghan security forces in a context marked by the threat posed by the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in the country. Moreover, my delegation believes that it is important to increase cooperation between the Sanctions Committee on Da'esh, Al-Qaida and the Taliban and the Counter-Terrorism Committee in order to counter any actions that could derail the peace process.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Senegal's full support for the economic, social and political goals set out by the Afghan Government in the hope of achieving a stable and prosperous Afghanistan living in perfect harmony with its neighbours.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): Let me first express my gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his tireless efforts in Kabul and for his comprehensive briefing today. I noted in particular the point he made that 2016 would be the year of survival. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Oyarzun Marchesi of Spain and to his colleagues for effectively guiding consultations on resolution 2274 (2016), which was adopted unanimously moments ago. I am also grateful for the statement by Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan.

I notice that we have 28 speakers today. I am only the ninth, and it is already 11.30. I will keep to the five-minute rule that the Security Council set.

Since Japan joined the Security Council in January, I have been underlining the importance of implementing resolutions. Security Council resolutions are effective only when implemented. I would like to discuss how the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is implementing its mandate.

Resolution 2274 (2016) describes UNAMA's mandate in detail, therefore I will not spell it out now. But I will say that UNAMA is implementing its mandate under extremely difficult circumstances. UNAMA plays a significant role in the progress of electoral reforms and in supporting the Special Electoral Reform Commission. As described in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/218), we have observed progress in this area. Confusion in the 2014 Afghan presidential election, which we still remember, occurred due to the lack of a robust electoral architecture. We are confident that UNAMA's efforts will fully ensure an inclusive, transparent and credible election in the future.

One of Japan's priorities has been, and is, the enhancement of Afghanistan's capability to maintain security. Japan has fully implemented its commitments by providing assistance for capacity-building and the salaries of the Afghan National Police. Despite strong support from Japan and other international donors, the situation in Afghanistan is far from stable. The number of civilian casualties in 2015 was at a record high, with more than 11,000 people either killed or injured. Many previous speakers focused on that point.

Under the deteriorating security situation, Japan welcomes the establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which includes Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States. The Group focuses on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and on the resumption of direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, which will hopefully provide a significant improvement in security conditions in Afghanistan.

My personal experience as Japan's first Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan tells me that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for Afghanistan. The efforsts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group's are highly appreciated, but the peace and reconciliation process is not the only answer to the many challenges the National Unity Government faces. The delay in starting direct talks should not be an excuse for the lack of progress in other key areas, such as anti-corruption, governance, the rule of law and human rights. Again, the key word is "implementation".

The Security Council meets every three months to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and from time to time adopts resolutions. But given the seriousness of the challenges that Afghanistan is facing, this approach seems like business as usual. What more can the Security Council do to support the efforts of UNAMA and the Government of Afghanistan? This has long been my question.

In my view, the Security Council could explore the possibility of conducting a Council mission to Afghanistan. It is certain that we would have to examine various elements of such a proposal, for example, the timing of a mission, the security situation, and what messages we would like to send to the country. But I believe that a Security Council mission can serve as a good opportunity to send a strong message of support

for the stability and the development of Afghanistan, which continues to face the difficult challenges that have been reported to us today.

As the Afghan Government implements its commitment to reforms on the basis of mutual accountability and makes a crucial transition towards self-reliance, Japan, and other members of the Security Council and the international community, I am sure, stand ready to offer their support.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I welcome Special Representative Haysom and Ambassador Saikal back to the Security Council and thank them for their briefings. I will stick to the five minute rule, particularly since we rigidly enforce it when we are President.

The extension of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today is a welcome sign of the Council's continued commitment to Afghanistan. It is a commitment to standing by the people and the Government of Afghanistan so that, together, they can forge the safe, stable and prosperous country that all Afghans deserve. As we have just heard from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the road ahead will be difficult at times, but together with the international community's assistance and the support of the NATO Resolute Support Mission, I am confident that Afghanistan can successfully navigate the path ahead. UNAMA will play a vital role in that effort.

We see three priorities for the coming months. First, economic growth needs to be the linchpin of Afghanistan's development. A growing economy will be the engine of opportunity for all Afghans — opportunity for men and women tired of years of violence, opportunity for the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators, and of course opportunity that will help Afghans choose a future inside Afghanistan rather than risk fleeing to find an uncertain future abroad.

I therefore congratulate Afghanistan on its recent accession to the World Trade Organization and on its progress on the International Monetary Fund programme. These are vital steps towards creating opportunity, steps that will integrate Afghanistan into lucrative international and regional trade networks, but major challenges remain and a clear strategy on economic reform will be needed by the National Unity Government if long-term growth is to be secured. I hope that Afghanistan's leaders will seize on recent momentum to make this a reality.

Turning to my second point, it is clear that an economy cannot flourish without security. Long-term growth needs long-term stability. As my Foreign Secretary made clear during his visit to Afghanistan last week, the United Kingdom fully supports the crucial work of the National Unity Government and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new leadership of the High Peace Council, who will also have an important role to play in these efforts.

But it is not just those within Afghanistan or the Quadrilateral Coordination Group who can assist this process. The international community and the region all can provide valuable support. Therefore, let us all make clear this Council's united support for the peace process, our united call for the Taliban to come to the negotiating table and our united encouragement for Afghanistan and Pakistan to cooperate even more closely to combat the shared threat posed to them by extremism.

The UNAMA report (S/2016/218) paints a clear picture of the consequences of such extremism. We wholly condemn the Taliban's continuing attacks, especially those against civilian targets. The violence must stop. The people of Afghanistan have paid too high a price for far too long. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of the Afghan Nation Security Forces in their efforts to halt the violence. I welcome their robust actions supported by their international allies, including to combat the emerging threat of Da'esh affiliates in the east of the country, to which Special Representative Haysom referred in his remarks.

My final point is about the National Unity Government. While a strong economy may require security, both can only really succeed with strong governance. The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the National Unity Government, and I hope we can all show our support today for President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah as they work together in pursuit of stability and prosperity.

The Brussels Conference in October is the moment for the National Unity Government to demonstrate its own commitment to the three priorities I have just outlined. It is a chance for them to showcase the reforms they have made so far and the reforms ahead

that will lead the country towards self-reliance in the coming years. This will need to include concrete action to combat corruption, a coherent plan for economic growth and a plan for reforming and strengthening the electoral system, one that builds on the Special Electoral Reform Commission. We support the work of UNAMA in this area.

I would like to conclude with this final point. Although the onus is on the National Unity Government, the Brussels Conference is also a moment for us, the international community, to match our words with action. It is the moment to set the parameters for the international community's future engagement in Afghanistan and really demonstrate what our commitment means. To step away now would not only damage the three priorities I have just outlined, but it would also send the wrong signal to the people and the Government of Afghanistan.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We would like to express our gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his extensive briefing and for his team's efforts in Afghanistan. We welcome the unanimous adoption of the resolution 2274 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for a year, and we thank the delegation of Spain for a job well done. Ukraine aligns itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union (EU).

Ukraine is persuaded that robust peace can be established in Afghanistan and that the only path tc that result is through a broad-based national reconciliation. We are of the opinion that there is no viable alternative to the National Unity Government and we deplore any initiatives resulting in internal tensions that could put Afghanistan's much desired stability at risk.

Like others, we commend the efforts of the recently established Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process to enable the holding of early peace talks between the Taliban factions and Afghan Government representatives. We also call on members of the international community with a degree of influence on the Taliban to use it to encourage their earnest participation in early peace negotiations.

We commend the Afghan Government's determination to focus its efforts on resolving economic issues and addressing the fiscal gap, poverty and unemployment, as stipulated in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, as well as to promote regional economic cooperation. However, the ability of the Government of Afghanistan to promote further reforms, in particular in the economic sphere, and to effectively confront the numerous challenges and threats posed by the insurgency and the activities of violent extremists, depends on the continued support provided by the country's international partners.

In this regard, we look forward to the July 2016 NATO Conference in Warsaw to consider further military support to Afghanistan and the 2016 Ministerial Conference hosted by the EU in Brussels in October 2016, where renewed donor assistance to civilians will be discussed. Nevertheless, we note that the extent of the donor community's commitment to security and development assistance to Afghanistan goes hand in hand with the progress made by the Afghan Government in advancing its reform and good-governance agenda.

Unfortunately, the efforts of the Afghan Government and its international partners are overshadowed by the overall deteriorating security situation in the country, with the intensification of violence by the Taliban movement and other terrorists and violent extremist groups as well as the dangerously growing presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its affiliates. On the territories upon which the Taliban and other violent extremist groups impose their cruel terror, one can witness the alarming picture of flagrant violations of human rights, the maltreatment of civilian populations, summary executions, deliberate abuses and continuing discrimination against women and girls, as well as the use of child soldiers. That creates an atmosphere of fear and terror in the entire region and contributes to instability and prolongation of conflicts.

Ukraine condemns all violations of international humanitarian law, in particular deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilian objects, internationally protected places, such as hospitals and clinics, as well as humanitarian and health personnel, thereby creating insurmountable difficulties for the implementation of the international community's humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan. We call on all parties in Afghanistan to take measures to minimize civilian casualties by taking all feasible precautions in that regard. We also call on the Government of Afghanistan to systematically investigate, with the support of UNAMA, all violations of international humanitarian law to ensure that all perpetrators are

held accountable, as well to ensure that the victims and their families are provided with appropriate remedies.

Given the appalling practice of the recruitment of children by the armed groups in the territory of Afghanistan, we commend the Government's commitment to ending and preventing grave violations against children, namely, through the full and complete implementation of the relevant action plan within the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, as well as its pledge to the United Nations "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign.

Ukraine is also highly concerned about the serious threat that anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices pose to the most vulnerable parts of the population, in particular women and children, in Afghanistan. We are of the opinion that the international community should continue to enact relevant measures to prevent the flow of weapons and military equipment to the Taliban and other violent terrorist extremist groups. We also consider it necessary for UNAMA, together with other United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Mine Action Support Team, to promote mine-risk education programmes in order to reduce the risks posed to civilians.

Ukraine, as a troop-contributing country to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, commends its national efforts in assisting Afghanistan in building effective and viable national security forces. We call on the United Nations and Afghanistan's international partners not to relent in helping the country bring about lasting peace, security and stability.

In conclusion, I would like to confirm Ukraine's full support for Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and for its endeavours to combat the scourge of international terrorism.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to thank Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the Ambassador of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for their respective briefing and statement.

The Government of President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai has been implementing a series of measures to strengthen institutions in order to promote peace and political stability with a view to ending the armed conflict that has impacted the nation for decades. Notwithstanding the progress achieved, the political and security situation remains fragile.

The attacks by armed groups, particularly the Taliban insurgency, have caused significant casualties in the Afghan security forces, which have been undermined in their capacity due to the low levels of recruitment of staff and the high attrition rates within the armed forces. That state of affairs is compounded by the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham and the Islamic Uzbekistan Movement. Given the complexity of those challenges, it is necessary that the international community support the efforts of the Afghan authorities to strengthen their institutional capacity at such a crucial crossroads. Otherwise, it would be to condemn the country and its people to the expansion and strengthening of terrorist groups, which today have ravaged with their barbarity other countries in the region and in Africa.

In that context, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates the fact that a peaceful and political negotiation among the major political actors is the only path to bring an end to the armed conflict and to achieve a stable and lasting peace. We support the statement expressed by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2016/218) that direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government are key in this process. In that regard, we appreciate the positive role played by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, composed of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States, in support of the peace dialogue and national reconciliation between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

Moreover, within the agenda of political reforms agreed by the Government of National Unity, we should highlight the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Electoral Reform Commission of December 2015 as a pending issue. Its implementation is essential to the strengthening of political institutions. Likewise, we are pleased that the interactions that have been registered among the Cabinet Ministry with the different local and regional Government levels. Those meetings, which have been led by President Ghani, constitute an advance towards better coordination at all levels of the public administration, while ensuring concrete results in governmental management to the benefit of the Afghan people.

In the area of the political empowerment of women, we recognize the efforts that the Government

of President Ghani has achieved in the implementation of the national action plan on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We must make particular mention of the emergency fund created by the Ministry of Women, which provides emergency medical care for women who have suffered abuse and violence, and we hope that this nefarious practice will become a thing of the past as quickly as possible.

The Afghan Government's efforts in overcoming obstacles to peace, stability and socioeconomic development require the active support of the international community. In that regard, we call on donors to provide resources to assist the socioeconomic development of the country and to bolster its national capacities.

In the area of bilateral relations, we are pleased to note the strengthening of bilateral cooperation between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, especially India and Iran. The high-level visits are a clear, unequivocal indication of the trend towards dialogue and solving problems of common interest.

In another vein, Venezuela wishes to stress the constructive work made by UNAMA in coordination with the Government. The role of the Mission has been essential in the promotion of peace, national reconciliation, regional cooperation and socioeconomic development. That is why our delegation supported the renewal of the mandate of this special political Mission, convinced that UNAMA's presence is of the utmost importance to supporting the work done by the Government of Afghanistan for the benefit of its people. In that context, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize the work of the achieved by the Permanent Misssion of Spain to negotiate resolution 2274 (2016), just adopted. We would also like to pay tribute to the UNAMA staff, who, with professionalism and dedication, have carried out their tasks in a scenario filled with risks and challenges.

Trafficking in narcotics continues to pose serious threats to the peace and stability of Afghanistan, while also being a public health issue with serious consequences for its population. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, 12.6 per cent of adults — or 2.4 million people — use drugs, which poses a real challenge to the future of the country, taking into account the diminished capacity to deliver health services that entails. Although the report also notes that there has been a decrease in poppy cultivation and in the number of seizures by the Afghan authorities, this illegal activity is the main source of financing for armed group. Combating the illicit trafficking in drugs requires, on the one hand, coordinated efforts among the various law enforcement agencies and, on the otehr regional and international cooperation. In that regard, we recognize the efforts undertaken by the Government, which has also had the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We reiterate that the effective fight against drugs requires international cooperation, including that of neighbouring countries, to prevent, combat and eliminate this scourge. It also requires the cooperation of users. Without demand, there would be no offer. Moreover, we urge the international community to continue to support the people and the Government of Afghanistan by providing resources and capacity to promote their comprehensive development.

It is necessary to remember that achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan requires the strengthening of security and the creation of economic and social conditions to allow the country to overcome the poverty, exclusion and discrimination that have burdened its citizens for decades and whose factors are main causes of conflict in that nation.

Our country expresses its concern with the ongoing attacks on the civilian population. The annual report for 2015 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan registers 11,002 victims for that year, making it the most lethal year reported by UNAMA since 2009. We are particularly concerned by the fact that boys and girls represented one-third of the victims from November 2015 to January 2016, for a total of 562 young minors affected. We condemn the recruitment of boys and girls. Moreover, United Nations personnel have continued to be subject to attacks, which we also condemn. All these acts are breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and carry criminal consequences. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/218), in 2015 the humanitarian situation deteriorated throughout the country, making it difficult for the humanitarian agencies difficult to do their work.

In conclusion, we encourage the Government of Afghanistan to maintain its efforts to achieve a broad and inclusive political process leading to a firm and lasting peace. Attaining that goal will need the cooperation of all sectors of Afghan society, together

with the help of the international community and the United Nations, particularly UNAMA.

Mrs. Schwalger (New Zealand): We too thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom and Ambassador Saikal for their briefings, and commend Spain for its skillful stewardship of the mandate renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The first year of Afghanistan's transformation decade has been a difficult one for the people of Afghanistan. As we have heard today, the security situation continues to deteriorate. Intense fighting has seen record numbers of civilians killed and wounded and the Taliban has now asserted its authority over a third of Afghanistan's district centres. Sadly, child casualties caused by ground engagements continue to rise, and an estimated 2 million refugees have fled the country in the past nine months alone. With the summer fighting season set to commence, prospects for the year ahead look even more challenging, as a number of speakers here have mentioned today.

The record of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in meeting these challenges has been mixed. They have displayed considerable courage and resilience on a number of occasions, scoring notable victories. At other times, they have displayed a worrying fragility. The economy remains extremely weak, with unemployment high and few prospects for improvement in the year ahead. It is clear that if it is to meet these challenges, Afghanistan will remain dependent on assistance from its core international partners for the foreseeable future. Against that bleak backdrop, several points merit highlighting.

First, to meet these challenges Afghanistan needs resolute, unified and effective national leadership like never before. We urgently need the National Unity Government to lift its game in providing this. That means getting serious about tackling rampant corruption, and it means ensuring strong leadership in key portfolios, including the security sector. The international community continues to have an important role to play in providing support for these efforts. We commend the work of UNAMA in providing focused, quality technical assistance, and sustaining funding in support of the long-term capacity of the Government of Afghanistan.

But all of this will amount to little without focused and effective national leadership. We look to Afghanistan's leadership to deliver on its obligations — first to the people of Afghanistan and, secondly, to those countries that have invested so much to provide them with the opportunity to restore Afghanistan to a fully functioning State. We recognize the scale and the complexity of the task, and we commend the continued resilience and determination of the Government and security forces of Afghanistan in the face of these enormous challenges.

The second point we would make is that there can be no peace in Afghanistan in the long term without a meaningful peace and reconciliation process.Again, we do not underestimate the challenges faced in achieving progress, particularly in the current circumstances, but we must ensure that we are laying the groundwork now for a successful process.

Thirdly, we call on regional partners to play their part in helping to restrict the flow of arms, fighters and narcotics across Afghanistan's borders that continues to fuel instability. We welcome the momentum in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process, and urge participants to carry forward the progress made at the most recent meeting in Islamabad.

Fourthly, we believe that greater use can and should be made of the Taliban sanctions regime as a tool for supporting peace and reconciliation and for combating the efforts of those who continue to work against a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.New Zealand believes that greater use can be made of the sanctions regime to incentivize individuals to refrain from activities that jeopardize prospects for peace, as well as to constrain the flow of arms and military material into the conflict.

We remain particularly concerned about the destabilizing effects of the continued flow of improvised explosive device components to the Taliban. We urge Member States to act on the call in resolution 2253 (2015) to share information, establish partnerships and develop national strategies and capabilities to counter inprovised explosive devices. As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Ambassador Van Bohemen hopes in the coming months to take forward a discussion on how better use can be made of the sanctions regime in this regard, including directly with key Afghan stakeholders.

In conclusion, the year ahead is shaping up to be a dangerous and uncertain one for the Government and people of Afghanistan. After our collective investment

and sacrifice over the past 15 years, we cannot afford to let the country fall once again into chaos.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me at the outset to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his briefing and particularly for his work. I also thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and our colleague Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

Allow me to express particular appreciation to the delegation of Spain for its work in preparing resolution 2274 (2016), which was submitted to the members well ahead of time, and for its participation in a broad and fruitful process of consultations. The outstanding work of the delegation of Spain stands out all the more when compared to certain recent resolutions of the Security Council, concerning which the delays and consultations were not exactly encouraging.

Afghanistan continues to face major political, economic and security challenges. We are therefore pleased that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Government of Afghanistan continue to maintain close relations, which is key to ensuring lasting peace and security in the country. It is also crucial that the United Nations and the international community continue to provide their support and assistance to the National Unity Government of Afghanistan, in strict compliance with the principles of national leadership and ownership, taking into account that major challenges still lie ahead in the country's reconstruction.

Uruguay encourages the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts and to continue on the same path, drawing on the principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity.

It is important that Afghanistan be able to continue the ongoing electoral reform process, so as to ensure that the parliamentary elections scheduled for this year take place in a democratic, transparent atmosphere and with the necessary guarantees.

Uruguay welcomes the initiatives undertaken to revive the peace process, as well as the agreement reached by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation for the peace talks held in December 2015.

Uruguay is concerned by the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, and in particular by the impact this situation has on civilians, who continue to be the most affected by the conflict, especially women and children. We are horrified by the over 11,000 civilian casualties in just 2015. In that respect, the grave violations of human rights makes it essential that the international community commit to the effective implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict. Afghan civilians continue to be those most affected by the conflict, with an ever-increasing number of civilian casualties and numerous human rights abuses.

Uruguay believes it imperative that the parties respect the obligations of international humanitarian law and the prohibition of targeted attacks against civilians. In the midst of this veritable calamity, we once again extend our thanks to the staff members of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations for their relief efforts and dedication in difficult security conditions. We encourage them to continue that work.

Another point of particular urgency is the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, especially the Taliban and groups associated with the Islamic State. Uruguay believes it is essential that the international community join forces against the financing of terrorist groups operating in the region, which are closely linked to the high volume of illegal drug trafficking documented in the country.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the President of the Security Council for convening this debate on Afghanistan. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Haysom, for his briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Saikal, for his statement.

Recently, the security situation in Afghanistan has worsened. Many conflicts and terrorist attacks have occurred inside that country, resulting in heavy civilian casualties. The Afghan Government of National Unity has worked to maintain national stability, fostering economic development and promoting national reconstruction. However, Afghanistan still has a long way to go before it can achieve comprehensive economic and social development and enable all its people to benefit from the peace dividend. That requires the joint efforts of all people in Afghanistan and the support and assistance of the international community. I would like to emphasize four points.

First, efforts should be made to improve the security environment in Afghanistan to avoid a reversal of the situation. The international community should vigorously support Afghanistan, including by helping to build the capacity of its national security forces. That should include intensified training for Afghanistan's counter-terrorism and border control officials and the improvement of its independent self-defence and counter-terrorism capabilities. The parties concerned should also comprehensively implement the Islamabad declaration of the fifth Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process, take effective security measures and formulate common counter-terrorism measures to help the Government respond effectively to the challenges and threats of terrorism, transboundary crime and drug trafficking.

Secondly, efforts should be made to support effective administration by the Afghan Government and to strengthen State governance. The Afghan Government of National Unity has begun formulating the new national development strategy. The international community should, in the light of the strategic priorities and specific needs of Afghanistan, help the Afghan Government to improve the efficiency of its administration and governance capabilities and consolidate the fruit of State-building efforts there. The parties in Afghanistan should also build solidarity and continue to settle their differences through dialogue and consultation in a commitment to achieve development and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, attention should be paid to the efficacy of assistance to ensure that Afghanistan benefits in the long term. The international community should continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan, while placing equal emphasis on providing such assistance and enabling the country to assist itself, and promoting comprehensive economic and social development in the country. Additional international aid would mean added hope for the Afghan people. The international community should continue to provide Afghanistan with relief in the form of humanitarian goods, and help ease the pressing needs of the Afghan population. Cooperation with regard to infrastructure and investment in trade should also be intensified, and human-resource training augmented in order to increase Afghanistan's ability to function independently. Resolution 2274 (2016) calls upon the parties to actively participate in economic initiatives, such as the "One Belt, One Road" strategy. This will provide for new economic opportunities for the development of Afghanistan. We hope that the parties concerned will take action through international participation.

Fourthly, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should continue to play an important role in coordinating international efforts. In accordance with the Council mandate and in the light of the aspirations of Afghanistan, the Mission should comprehensively push forward international efforts in support of Afghanistan's development and improved governance. In the political field, UNAMA should support an Afghan-led peace process, and should support the Afghan parties in bolstering their confidence-building measures. With regard to regional cooperation, UNAMA should fully leverage Afghanistan's unique geographical advantage as it assists the country in its move towards regional cooperation and in boosting the international community's confidence in a smooth Afghan transformation.

The realization of extensive and inclusive national reconciliation in Afghanistan is the only way to settle the Afghan question. China supports a reconciliation process that is Afghan-owned and -led. China has actively participated in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation in an effort to create an enabling external environment and to help the Government work out a practicable road map for reconciliation. China is ready to join all parties in continuing to play a positive role in pushing the reconciliation process in Afghanistan forward, and in helping to bring about the timely attainment of lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his briefing. I also thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan.

I associate myself in advance with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

A year and a half after the beginning of the transition, Afghanistan has fully entered the transformation decade. The Government has demonstrated its will to move forward under often difficult circumstances. In that regard, I reiterate France's support for the Afghan Government to encourage it to continue its efforts undertaken since September 2014. France continues to stand alongside Afghanistan, particularly within the framework of the friendship and cooperation treaty.

The year 2016 began with positive signals, which included initiatives that could lead to a peace process and recent nominations to the High Peace Council and the Ministry of the Interior. However, the Afghan Government has many substantial challenges before it — and they are substantial indeed. At the level of security, the conflict continues to spread, the level of violence unfortunately remains very high and civilians are the main victims. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have on the whole managed to maintain control of the situation on the ground and to counter some of the acts of terror in the large cities, despite severe tactical, logistical and organizational difficulties. In that context, the Government should not let up in its efforts, with the support of its international partners, to build its capacities.

At the political level, it is essential to maintain the Government's unity in a context fraught with tensions. The effective relaunching of the peace process by way of the offer made to the Taliban to hold direct talks — as well as through electoral reform, a more active fight against corruption and the relaunching of the economy, which has been hit by a severe crisis leading to hundreds of thousands of Afghans illegally emigrating to Europe — are all areas in which expectations are particularly high.

The illicit economy, and in particular drug trafficking, are major impediments to the security and development of Afghanistan. This trafficking, together with the illegal exploitation of mineral resources, is the main resource for the armed insurrection. A high level of corruption persists, which stifles the development of legal economic activities, while constituting a major public health issue.

Important steps have been taken since the Government took office, including the adoption of a national action plan. Those steps must be maintained and strengthened, with the assistance of the United Nations. In that context, we welcome the call of resolution 2274 (2016), which was adopted today, to review, in close consultation with the Afghan Government, the United Nations role in supporting the fight against the illicit economy, including drug trafficking, and in encouraging international cooperation.

Finally, the situation of women and children remains worrying. It is essential that the authorities and Afghan civil society continue to mobilize to fully implement the national action plan on women and peace and security adopted in 2015 in line with resolution 1325 (2000) by establishing appropriate financing mechanisms. It is also vital for the Afghan Government to continue to implement its commitments in the area of protecting children in armed conflict arising from the 2011 and 2014 action plans. The recent conclusions drawn by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict will provide a useful road map for Afghanistan and the United Nations in that area. The response to those challenges will be important in the creation of the conditions for the voluntary and sustainable return of Afghan citizens who have sought refuge outside the country, which the Government has made one of its priorities. In this fragile context, the international community must continue to support Afghanistan as it moves towards greater stability, prosperity and democracy. The conferences in Brussels and Warsaw later this year will offer many opportunities to reaffirm that message.

While Afghanistan continues its political and security transition, the support of the United Nations, in particular for the Government, remains essential, especially to make it possible for the people to benefit from Government programmes and international assistance. The resolution we have just adopted this morning reiterates the UNAMA's central role, which embodies the will of the international community to continue to support Afghanistan. We attach great importance to the United Nations continuing to be availed of the means necessary to achieve that goal.

In conclusion, allow me to praise the work of all United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, who are working under especially difficult circumstances.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Angola.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his briefing on the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan (S/2016/218). We commend Mr. Haysom and his team for the remarkable achievements of the Mission, despite the special circumstances under which they operate.

The present debate has been a good opportunity for the Council to assess the political, security, humanitarian and human rights, as well as regionally and internationally related, developments after the

update of December 2015 (see S/PV.7591). We commend the efforts deployed by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process — comprising Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States — aimed at reinvigorating the peace and national reconciliation process. The initiatives undertaken by the Group underpin the possibility of reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict through dialogue among the Afghani Government, the Taliban and other groups involved in the conflict. We encourage the Group to continue supporting the Afghani national peace and reconciliation process.

Over the most recent period of time, since the debate held in December, the security situation has remained unstable and characterized by Taliban attacks in various regions of the country and an increase in activity by terrorists, especially Al-Qaida and groups affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. In fact, conflict-related violence has increased, while the Afghan National Security Forces seeked to contain insurgent activities resulting in more civilian casualties. The recent killing by the Taliban in Kabul of seven members of the press was a direct and totally unacceptable attack on the freedom of expression. We convey our condolences to the families and urge all parties to the conflict to respect the recognized rights of the press and the freedom of information.

Stability and long-term prosperity in Afghanistan depends on national reconciliation based on peace, on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and on regional cooperation based on mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. In that connection, we commend the efforts deployed by the Afghani authorities in seeking an active involvement with regional partners. A positive step was the joint inauguration last December by President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan of the Heart of Asia fifth ministerial conference in Islamabad, with the participation of high-level representatives from the region. Its final declaration focused on the fight against security threats, the promotion of economic cooperation and the strengthening of confidence-building measures, and calling on the Taliban and opposition groups to engage in peace talks with the Afghani Government were steps in the right direction.

In its 2015 annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, UNAMA cited more than 11,000 civilian casualties for the year, representing the largest number it had recorded since 2009, with most of the deaths attributed to anti-Government forces. Children continue to find themselves in an appalling predicament, accounting for almost a third of all civilian deaths during the reporting report. We condemn the indiscriminate killing of civilians in the strongest terms, and urge all parties to respect their obligations under international human-right and humanitarian law and to prevent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. We hope that the recommendations in the report will help to improve the mechanisms for protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

We were pleased to note the statement of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the effect that the country continues to make strides in the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights, especially the rights of children, in implementing the road map, preventing the recruitment of child soldiers and complying with the Government's pledge to empower women, ensure their enjoyment of equal rights and encourage their participation in all areas of life.

The report's comprehensive analysis of the situation in Afghanistan in the area of drugs in 2015 highlights a substantial reduction in poppy cultivation and opium production, and sharp increases in drug seizures over the past three years. That is a matter for rejoicing in a country so heavily dependent on the drug economy, and given the latter's role in funding insurgents and terrorists.

The challenges facing Afghanistan are immense. We share the view that the country's top priority is the resumption of the peace and national reconciliation process, so that it can overcome its political and security crises and enable the Afghan people to achieve peace and stability. It is crucial that the international community maintain its engagement with Afghanistan and its peace and development. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's request to extend UNAMA's mandate for one year through resolution 2274 (2016), which we have done this morning.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We welcome the Security Council's adoption this morning of resolution 2274

(2016), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for another year.

We appreciate the welcome accorded in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/218) to the progress that has been made in initiating the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan, which has "reinvigorated prospects" for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. That is the course my country has consistently advocated for in order to end the decades of war and suffering endured by the Afghan people.

Unfortunately, the long war in Afghanistan continues. Over the past year, the security situation has deteriorated further. Insurgent groups have exerted intense pressure on Government forces. Civilian casualties continue to increase, with violent attacks in Kabul and across the country, including on the Pakistan Consulate in Jalalabad in January. Pakistan condemns all terrorism. There can be no justification for indiscriminate attacks on innocent children, women and men. The prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has not only imposed epic suffering on its people, it has also prevented Afghanistan and the entire region from realizing its immense economic potential. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is essential to regional stability and economic progress. As Pakistan has repeatedly affirmed, peace in Afghanistan is in our vital interest.

Pakistan is gratified that the international community has reached a firm consensus on the belief that a negotiated peace, promoted through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, is the best, indeed the only, hope for securing durable peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. That has been Pakistan's long-standing position and recommendation. A promising beginning has been made in fostering such a negotiation process in the last couple of months.

Following the positive momentum generated by the successful Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Process hosted in Islamabad in December and jointly inaugurated by President Ashraf Ghani and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States reached a decision to create the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, aimed at giving decisive impetus to Afghanistan's peace efforts. The new mechanism's success is predicated on the shared commitment and responsibility of each of its four members. Each must undertake to play its part in moving the process forward towards our common objective. The Coordination Group has met four times and has created a detailed road map for a workable peace and reconciliation process. The implementation of the road map was initiated through the undertaking of a realistic assessment of opportunities as well as likely obstacles to reconciliation, and will culminate in implementing the framework and modalities for an eventual peace settlement. Despite delays, Pakistan remains hopeful that direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban groups will be resumed in the near future, in accordance with the road map.

The task ahead is complex and arduous. Our expectations should be realistic. We must exercise strategic patience. Unrealistic targets and deadlines must be avoided, especially now that we have a clear road map. What is vital now is to create an enabling environment conducive to operationalizing and sustaining a peace process. To that end, the following factors will be critical.

First, we need consistent and unified positions and declarations from the Afghan Government affirming its commitment to working for a negotiated peace. In that regard, we welcome recent statements by the Afghan leadership and the revamping of the High Peace Council as steps in the right direction.

Secondly, we need a demonstrated capacity of the Afghan security forces to hold their ground. Their ability to do that will obviously help to create the necessary conditions for the Taliban to return to the negotiating table.

Thirdly, all four members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, having committed to sharing responsibilities, must use their respective influence and political capital to contribute to the success of the process. In that regard, the ability of the Afghan Government to craft a set of incentives to engage the Taliban in sustained talks will be essential. It would be wise to avoid imposing preconditions, since that could abort the negotiations even before they get under way. As I said, that process is our best hope for lasting peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan will play its due part. As a first step, we have offered to host direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban.

Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan will be a vital component of the endeavour to realize peace and security within Afghanistan and the entire region. What we urgently need now is greater cooperation on border management in order to stop the

movement of terrorists. We have a long border that is not easy to control. There are incursions by terrorist members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan across the international border from Afghanistan. Pakistan has repeatedly called for cooperation in monitoring and controlling the border but, sadly, Kabul has not been forthcoming so far. Indeed, there has been opposition to Pakistan's creation of border barriers. We urge Kabul to step forward and respond positively to our efforts to manage the border.

I would like to say here that the combined potential of Pakistan and Afghanistan is considerable. Expanded trade, energy cooperation and the implementation of the various trans-regional economic projects already identified can greatly enhance peace and prosperity in and for the entire region. We must actively promote the realization of the immense opportunities that can flow from our bilateral cooperation.

Pakistan looks forward to a relationship with Afghanistan based on shared values and interests and respect for each other's sensitivities. We stand committed to working with Afghanistan for the improvement of this relationship for the mutual benefit of our peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

My country joins in the expressions of appreciation for the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its Head, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom, have done and welcomes the renewal of the mandate just approved by the Security Council. We also thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his exhaustive briefing.

The first year of Afghanistan's transformation decade has been difficult and complex. There has been a troubling deterioration in the security situation due to an escalation in indiscriminate violence by insurgent groups and terrorist attacks. The latest data is unequivocal — 2015 broke yet another tragic record in terms of civilian deaths. The increase concerns mainly the weakest categories of society, including women — up by 37 per cent from 2014; and children, up by 1 per cent. As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/218), there has also been a 78 per cent increase in internal displacement and an increase in migration. In this context, the Afghan forces have shown great courage and resistance, at the cost of many lives lost, but the threat of destabilization and the challenges before Afghanistan today continue to be formidable and to demand the support of the international community as a whole.

Italy hereby reiterates its support for the efforts made to establish peace, security and stability in Afghanistan, and to protect the achievements reached so far in the fields of democracy and civil and social development. Among the most prominent of these are the gains made in the rights of women and girls, which we must do our utmost to preserve and consolidate. To this end, together with our NATO partners, we have renewed our presence in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission. With our military contingent — which is still the third-largest presence in the country, deployed mainly but not exclusively in Herat — Italy fulfils its role as framework nation for the western region of the country, helping the Afghan National Security Forces to strengthen capacity and address autonomously the violent actions of insurgent groups.

We support the efforts of the National Unity Government in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We salute the constructive dialogue forged in recent months among the countries of the region, in particular between the Governments of Kabul and Islamabad, and we support the efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process to foster peace talks between the Government, the Taliban and other groups willing to negotiate. In this context, it is essential to ensure the active involvement of women's representatives in negotiations, and we appreciate the will expressed in this regard by the Afghan Government.

Improving the security situation is also crucial to enabling Afghanistan to achieve growth and self-sustaining development and to overcome the current precarious economic situation, which creates uncertainty and has driven many citizens to migrate. That is why it is absolutely necessary for Afghanistan to implement effectively the reforms outlined by the National Unity Government within the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. Concrete progress in economic governance, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and respect for human rights — and especially the human rights of women,

ensuring women's empowerment at every level of society — are all priorities.

It is also more urgent than ever to continue to pursue electoral reforms, in view of the parliamentary and district votes scheduled for next fall. This will enable the consolidation of the partnership with the international community on the basis of the principle of mutual commitments, in particular in view of the Brussels conference and, above all, in the interest of the country and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to participate in today's debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/218), Special Representative of the Secretary-General Nicholas Haysom for his briefing, and Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for their briefings. Taken cumulatively, these portray the ongoing saga of the trials and tribulations that the Government and the brave people of Afghanistan face.

The distress signals are unremitting: a worsening security situation, an increase in the tempo of insurgent activities, a greater toll of civilian casualities, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. All point to the need for the greater engagement of the international community in support of the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan. Just last week, during an interaction in another part of this building, Chief Justice Abdul Rasheed Rashid of Afghanistan explained that the distressing circumstances confronting him were such that for long he had not even been able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, such as going out for a walk, which is something we all take for granted.

The Secretary-General's report confirms the worrisome security situation. It is alarming that there were more than 11,000 documented civilian causalities in 2015. Another disturbing development is the expansion of the Taliban's territorial reach. Also, the efforts to incite ethnic violence and conflict are indeed serious developments. We urge the Security Council to look into the security situation and the means to contain it with a sense of urgency.

Groups and individuals that perpetrate violence against the people and Government of Afghanistan cannot be allowed to exercise control or wield influence over any part of Afghanistan's territory, as that would pose serious threats to the gains of the past 15 years. The effective implementation of the Security Council sanctions regimes — including those under resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities; and those under resolution 1988 (2011) concerning the Taliban — is a tangible measure that will go a long way towards imposing restrictions on the listed entities' and individuals' movements and assets and strengthening the arms embargo.

As Afghanistan's friend and neighbour and a country of the region, India is working to support Afghanistan in accordance with its priorities and national circumstances. The Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, visited Afghanistan on 25 December 2015. During the visit, along with President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, he jointly dedicated to the Afghan nation the National Assembly building constructed under India-Afghanistan development cooperation. The Parliament complex is a symbol of the resolve of Afghanistan to shape its future through votes and debates and the belief that terror and violence cannot be the instruments to shape Afghanistan's future or dictate the choices which the people of Afghanistan make. Following the visit, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah visited India in January 2016. These visits reflect the blossoming with a renewed vigour and vitality of India's cooperation with Afghanistan. India is also steadfast in its support for Afghanistan in plurilateral and multilateral forums and will host the next Ministerial Meeting of the Heart of Asia process later this year.

While the brave Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are doing their utmost in fighting the forces of terrorism and extremism with courage and resilience, India extends its full support to Afghanistan in strengthening its defensive capabilities and preserving Afghanistan's unity and territorial integrity. We stand ready to collaborate with Afghanistan in expanding the training opportunities for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in relevant Indian institutions, based on the requirements of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan will be able to achieve its optimum economic potential if it is allowed the freedom of transit to major markets of South Asia. We are working with Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop trilateral transit and participation in the

development of the Chabahar Port, which will augment our connectivity with Afghanistan.

We support the Afghan Government-led reconciliation process, which respects the red lines drawn by the people of Afghanistan and the international community, namely, that the groups and individuals to be reconciled must renounce violence and abide by the Constitution of Afghanistan.

We welcome the resolution extending UNAMA's role in assisting Afghanistan's political and economic reconstruction process (resolution 2274 (2016)), as it is uniquely placed to coordinate the international community's efforts in the country. For our part, India will continue to steadfastly stand with Afghanistan during its transformation decade and will do our utmost to support the valiant efforts of the people and the Government of Afghanistan towards peace and stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Grant (Canada): I would like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to address the Security Council.

Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its ongoing critical work and welcomes the latest report (S/2016/218) of the Secretary-General. Canada is grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Haysom for his briefing today and for his continued dedication and commitment to advancing peace, development and human rights in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is now into the second year of its transformation decade, a crucial period for strengthening security and moving beyond aid dependence. We welcome the recent achievements of the Afghan Government in the face of challenging circumstances, including elaborating a new reform agenda, dealing with a fragile economy, countering an intensifying insurgency, engaging in the peace process and undertaking efforts to strengthen regional economic integration.

Canada supports the Afghan Government's efforts to implement its reform agenda. Through 2017, we will contribute $227 million in bilateral development assistance to support programming in education, health, women's and girls' rights and empowerment, and humanitarian assistance through capacity-building in disaster management.

Improved security remains key to Afghanistan's short-term stability and to the achievement of its long-term economic and development goals. It will also encourage the return of refugees and help convince Afghans to remain at home and contribute to their country's future.

While Afghan security forces have stood strong in the face of considerable challenges, the overall increase in violence across much of the country, including mounting civilian casualties, particularly among children, points to the need for continued support for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). Canada is participating in current NATO-led security efforts by providing $330 million over three years to sustain the ANDSF.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada also supports an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process and welcomes the recent efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group. While peace will not come easily, we are heartened by the Group's efforts and call on the Taliban to come to the table and negotiate in good faith. Critical decisions for a lasting peace cannot be taken without the participation of major stakeholder groups affected by Afghanistan's conflict.

Canada also stresses the importance of ensuring an inclusive peace process that allows the voices of Afghan women to be heard, in line with resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. In this vein, we welcome the Government of Afghanistan's recent finalization of its national action plan for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this resolution.

Canada also continues to call upon the Government of Afghanistan to fully implement the elimination of violence against women law and to make every effort to guarantee the participation of women in all facets of Afghan life, free from violence and intimidation. We welcome the Government's recent steps to strengthen services for women, including through the launch of an emergency fund to assist women victims of violence. We also look forward to the Government of Afghanistan's completion and implementation of the women's economic empowerment national action plan.

Canada continues to stand with the Afghan people as they strive for a more secure and prosperous future.

We call on Afghanistan's leaders to redouble their collaborative efforts to keep Afghanistan moving forward on the path towards improved stability, accountability and self-reliance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to Angola for today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the representative of Afghanistan for his statement, as well as Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing and presentation of the report (S/2016/218) of the Secretary-General.

According to the Secretary-General's report, the security situation deteriorated further in 2015. Indeed, there was a very high number of recorded security incidents, representing a 3 per cent increase from 2014 and the second-highest number since 2001. The situation remains volatile, and Afghanistan continues to face major security, economic and political challenges. The sustained support of the international community is needed to support the National Unity Government in order to address those challenges in the framework of national ownership and leadership.

The Taliban's attempts to expand its reach to 24 district centres, in addition to its temporarily seizing the provincial capital of Kunduz, should be a matter of great concern to all of us. The report of the Secretary-General once again refers to the emergence of Da'esh and its offshoots, including the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province in Afghanistan, along with the spectrum of other terrorist and extremist groups. This is another reason for international and regional powers to support the National Unity Government in its fight against terrorism.

We condemn all violent attacks committed by the Taliban and all other terrorist groups, as well as any cooperation with them, since we believe that this will encourage them in their odious behaviour and thus be counterproductive to the establishment of peace in Afghanistan. At the same time, Iran reiterates its support for an Afghan-led peace process.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to the consolidation of peace and progress in the region. We see great potential in our economic cooperation with Afghanistan and are ready to increase bilateral cooperation, particularly on security matters, counter-narcotics efforts, development projects, economic cooperation in the fields of infrastructure and agriculture as well as finding a durable solution for Afghan refugees.

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah visited Iran from 4 to 6 January, where he met Iranian leaders at the highest level. There was also a visit to the Chabahar port facilities, a venture by Afghanistan, India and Iran that, upon completion, will be very beneficial to Afghanistan as a landlocked country. In the joint declaration, Iran and Afghanistan committed to increasing connectivity, with emphasis on the Khaf-Herat railway and a planned trilateral Afghanistan-Iran-India transit corridor, as well as the need to accelerate progress on a bilateral cooperation agreement and to form a joint working group to study transboundary water issues on the Harirud River.

On the counter-narcotics efforts, we take positive note of the *Afghanistan Drug Report 2015*, which suggests that there have been substantial reductions in opium cultivation and production in parallel with incremental increases in drug seizures. We take that as a good sign after several years in which we witnessed an increase in opium cultivation in Afghanistan. The increase in narcotics is mainly due to prevailing insecurity and poverty. Narcotics is a real threat to the region and beyond, and should be addressed by the international community in a very serious and comprehensive manner through support for regional initiatives such as the triangular cooperation on countering narcotics among Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The strong support and commitment of international donors, Afghan authorities and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are essential to deterring the menace of drug cultivation and drug trafficking. Narcotics are not only a social health challenge, but also and more importantly a major source of income for extremist and terrorist groups.

Iran continues to participate in the work of the Tripartite Review Commission in order to plan for the voluntary, safe, dignified and gradual repatriation of Afghan refugees. Success in voluntary repatriation will depend first and foremost on providing for the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan, and underscores the necessity to

mobilize more international support for this purpose. We maintain our support for hundred thousands of Afghan refugees, including students at all levels from primary to university education, pending their eventual repatriation. We welcome any effort to help overcome the main reintegration challenges faced by returnees and to formulate a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy.

Iran continues to offer its full support to the promotion of security, stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan, as we consider the security of Afghanistan to be the security of our borders and the region. We support UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment of the United Nations to sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as set forth in final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan. We need to utilize the UNAMA mandate and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas requested by the Government.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I congratulate you, Sir, on your leadership of the Security Council this month. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/218) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Haysom, for his briefing and the very valuable work being done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Sweden fully aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, and would like to make a few additional, brief remarks.

The year 2015 was seen as critical for Afghanistan; 2016 will be no less important. The Afghan National Unity Government has an important task at hand to move ahead with the self-reliance reform agenda. At the same time, Afghanistan is pursuing a potential peace process, enacting critically needed economic and political reforms, and preparing for elections while facing a challenging security situation. We all need to give full support to those efforts.

UNAMA will also play an important role in supporting the endeavours of the Afghan National Unity Government. The Mission has been essential in the efforts for peace, stability and development and will continue to be a cornerstone of international engagement. We believe that there is room to allow UNAMA to play an even more active role in facilitating humanitarian access, promoting human rights and providing good offices in support of a peace process.

Furthermore, the upcoming Nato Warsaw Summit and the donor conference in Brussels later this year will be important to determining future international support to Afghanistan. In that context, we urge all parties to remain committed and to deliver on their pledges. This is about doing our part to instil hope and opportunities, especially for the young Afghan population, to rebuild their country. We all know that building peace takes time and that many other urgent situations require our attention and resources, but we must remain committed and take a long-term perspective on Afghanistan.

The escalation of violence has led to an appalling increase in civilian casualties and a worsened humanitarian situation. As in many other instances, women and children are particularly affected. We are also worried by the recent and increasing number of attacks against health clinics across the country. All sides in the conflict need to make sure that civilians are afforded protection in accordance with international humanitarian law.

A peace agreement is the only viable option for long-term stability and development in Afghanistan. We welcome the progress made so far by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, and are encouraged by signs of confidence between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We support the work ahead in realizing the road map. In these and future talks, women should be included and able to participate fully and on equal terms. Their empowerment and organization is to the benefit of any society. It is crucial to the legitimacy and strength of any agreement, and a means to reach the uniting peace that the Ambassador of Afghanistan rightly spoke of earlier today.

Sweden's commitment to Afghanistan is substantial and long-term, with the ambition of contributing approximately $1.2 billion during the transformation decade. We hope that other key partners in the region and the wider international community will join in this long-term approach. We will also continue to assist in developing the Afghan National Defence and Security

Forces through participation in the Resolute Support Mission in 2016.

The Afghan National Unity Government has made commendable progress on a number of issues, despite a multitude of challenges. It and the Afghan people deserve our continued support as they seek to build a self-reliant and peaceful future.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): We welcome the unanimous adoption today of resolution 2274 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The year ahead brings with it both opportunities and significant challenges for Afghanistan and the international community that stands with it. In 2016, we see the possibility of progress towards peace talks, another chance for Afghans to exercise their democratic rights, and major meetings that will plot a path forward for the international community's involvement in Afghanistan. Security, governance and the reform agenda remain key priorities.

The National Unity Government, under the leadership of President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, has proven to be resilient and responsive to the expectations of the Afghan people. Those expectations now turn to the forthcoming parliamentary elections, and we encourage the National Unity Government to advance the reforms recommended by the Special Electoral Reform Commission. We commend the progress made thus far, as well as broader progress on economic and judicial reform, and urge perseverance in continuing this progress.

The achievements of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process in laying the groundwork for peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban should also be commended. No one can doubt the challenges ahead, but it is only through such a process that security and stability will be restored. We urge all parties, including the Taliban, to make further progress in 2016.

Major international meetings in Warsaw in July and Brussels in October will provide opportunities for Afghanistan and the international community to plan the way forward. Australia will be ready to join our partners in recommitting to Afghanistan's future. We urge continued commitment to reforms within existing frameworks in the lead-up to these conferences.

Insecurity and conflict continue to pervade every aspect of life and governance in Afghanistan. Law and order and effective policing are key to securing public trust. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have fought bravely and resolutely, but the insurgency remains defiant. The Afghan population still bears the brunt of this war, as United Nations reporting on civilian casualties tells us, and we condemn in the strongest terms recent attacks by the insurgency that have killed dozens of innocent Afghan civilians.

Through its coordination, assistance and reporting roles, UNAMA's contribution to Afghanistan and its people has been profound and hard-fought. We applaud Mr Haysom's long and distinguished leadership as Special Representative and Head of UNAMA, as well as the dedicated UNAMA staff, and thank them for their service.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Vale de Almeida.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania — all candidates countries to join the European Union; the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/218) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan for his briefing.

Let me start by reiterating the EU's full support for the continued important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people,and in coordinating the international community's assistance. The successful implementation of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework is essential to advancing reforms that are crucial to Afghanistan's development and stability. It is the results from these reforms that will underpin the unity of the Government and a continued unity of purpose and the confidence of the Afghan people in the country's future. The conference to be convened in Brussels in October will be an additional step in that

direction. The role of the United Nations continues to be vital in assisting the National Unity Government in implementing its priorities.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains tense, as highlighted by the Secretary-General's report. The EU is concerned that the number of civilian casualties caused by conflict and attacks by all fighting parties have reached record numbers, with insurgency attacks very often indiscriminately targeting the civilian population and increasingly affecting women and children. We need to be very clear on this. The EU condemns these insurgent groups' attacks, which threaten the stability and progress of Afghanistan. More than ever, we need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

The European Union fully supports the efforts being made towards the start of peace and reconciliation talks between the Government of Afghanistan and insurgency groups, as sponsored by the United States, China and Pakistan. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process has been working hard to create the conditions for renewed talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. We hope that such a first meeting can materialize soon and become an ongoing process. Afghan leaders should ensure that any delegation engaging in direct talks is representative of wider Afghan society. Afghan women must be able to participate fully in negotiations on the future of their country.

The EU welcomes the nomination for appointment of the new President of the High Peace Council in Afghanistan in the hope that this will help facilitate future negotiations. The signal of meaningful peace talks would have a huge positive effect on economic development and governance in Afghanistan, as well as international efforts to that end, directly contributing to a sustainable Afghan State. We call on all countries, in particular Afghanistan's neighbours, to support such an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It is time to invest in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity and to abandon the tactics of violence, destabilization and misery. Afghan women and men need to regain confidence in their future. This would contribute to reducing the migratory pressures that weigh so heavily on Afghanistan's neighbours and on the States members of the EU.

Despite the challenges of cooperation in the Central and South Asian regions, the recent progress made through developments in ambitious regional infrastructure projects is promising. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project, linking Central and South Asia, could create a new momentum for regional economic cooperation and connectivity, particularly in collaboration with a regionally backed peace process. The EU also continues to be a reliable partner in regionally owned processes, including the Heart of Asia process, which has shown encouraging signs of improving regional dynamics. Credit should go to President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and other leaders in the region for their endeavours in this regard. The EU also encourages the strengthening of regional cooperation in border management and anti-narcotics activities.

Electoral reform is crucial for Afghanistan. The electoral reform process has made some, albeit slow, progress. The parliamentary and district council elections, provisionally planned for 15 October, rely on further electoral reform to ensure a fair, democratic process. The EU welcomes the nominations of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Interior in Afghanistan, and hope that this will renew momentum to effectively implement reforms in this sector and overcome vested interests opposed to it. We should ensure the promotion of the rights and the continued active and equal involvement and participation of women in Afghanistan at all levels of society. To this end, the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the National Unity Government's national action plan on women, peace and security for 2015-2022 are crucial.

The EU supports Afghanistan through comprehensive political, security and development efforts, and will continue to do so. We look forward to the NATO Warsaw Summit in July, which will contribute to the reform and sustainment of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The Brussels conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 4 and 5 October, will reaffirm the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan's economic and political development over the coming years. This will include further improving governance and the rule of law, promoting sustainable development results, and implementing effective measures on anti-corruption and counter-narcotics. The fostering of full respect for human rights, and in particular the human rights

of women and girls, will remain a cornerstone of our cooperation.

Afghanistan will need the ongoing commitment of the international community at or near current levels to continue on the path to sustainability. Concrete commitments and delivery by both the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, including partners in the region, will underpin the Brussels conference. It is for the Afghan National Unity Government, the international and the regional partners alike to maintain the momentum for reform, for Afghan self-reliance and for peace. The EU would also like to commend the important work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, and calls on all parties in Afghanistan to implement the conclusions adopted by the Working Group on 2 March.

In conclusion, international engagement remains fundamental to Afghanistan's future. The Brussels conference aims to facilitate such engagement and mobilize support, matched by an equally strong commitment on the part of the Government of Afghanistan to delivering on concrete reform objectives and achieving real change. The consequences of disengagement should not be underestimated, and we value UNAMA's critical role in promoting peace and security for all Afghans.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): First, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nicholas Haysom, for his comprehensive briefing today. We highly appreciate the outstanding efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in leading and coordinating international civilian efforts to promote human rights, economic development, political stability and regional and international cooperation. We commend the Mission for its remarkable support for the Afghan Government in its striving for security, peace and development.

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Supported by the international community, Afghanistan has made significant progress over the past 14 years. Greater observance of human rights, in particular women's rights, advances in the field of counter-narcotics and fostering regional and international cooperation and coordination are examples of the progress made last year. Nevertheless, to achieve long-lasting peace and the maintenance of security and human rights, much remains to be done. Further reforms by the Afghan Government are of the essence. The year 2016 will yet again be a critical year for Afghanistan. We look forward to the Warsaw NATO Summit in July and the Brussels Conference in October. Germany will not falter in its commitment to Afghanistan in terms of support for its development, stabilization and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, and by participating as lead nation in the Resolute Support Mission.

We are highly concerned about the volatile security situation and the resulting high number of civilian casualties. We encourage the Afghan Government to continue its efforts in countering the rising levels of displacement and low rates of economic growth. Nevertheless, facing an intense level of insurgency, the efforts of the Afghan Government to strengthen regional economic integration and to move forward in activating a peace process have been duly noted. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have proven their strong commitment and great courage. We therefore commend them for their efforts to establish and uphold peace and security in their country.

We encourage and support a peace process among all Afghan parties, which we regard as the only path to a sustainable internal peace. We welcome the quadrilateral initiative. A peace process can succeed only if it engages not only the Government, but also the population of Afghanistan and its political representatives. It will also need the unequivocal backing of the international community here at the United Nations, and especially of all Afghanistan's neighbours. As Chair of the International Contact Group and one of the largest donors to Afghanistan, Germany will continue to play an active role to that end.

For Germany and the European Union, migration from Afghanistan has become a pressing issue with the arrival of over 150,000 Afghan nationals to Germany this past year alone. Germany will fulfil its international obligation and moral duty to provide those fleeing persecution with international protection. At the same time, it is counting on the full cooperation of the Afghan Government to ensure a prompt return of those who are not in need of such protection to their home country and to stem the drain on its human resources. Afghanistan and its international partners can be successful in building a future for the country

and its people only if Afghans themselves believe in that future.

Lasting peace, guaranteed compliance with human rights and sustainable growth can be achieved only by a strong Afghan Government and the involvement of all Afghan people. We commend the Afghan Government for its work towards democratization and electoral reform, and further encourage it to ensure transparency and accountability in all political processes, as well as freedom of speech. We condemn the murder of seven media professionals in Kabul by the Taliban on 20 January, which was an attack on the free flow of ideas and the liberty of the media, and offer our condolences to the families of the victims.

To conclude, let me assure the Council that Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan during the transformation decade, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to thank the Angolan presidency for having organized this meeting, the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2016/218), Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Mr. Nicholas Haysom for his briefing, and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal for his statement.

Resolution 2274 (2016), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), has arrived at an opportune time, when change and transformation are dominating the agenda of Afghanistan. We welcome the role assumed by UNAMA in assisting the Afghan people to achieve a bright future. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts in that regard.

The year 2015 was an important time for Afghanistan. The Afghan National Unity Government, which we consider to be the symbol of the Afghan people's unity, completed its first year in power. During that period, the National Unity Government undertook important reforms in various fields, from good governance to drug-trafficking, and economy to anti-corruption. Although opposition is an integral part of political life in any democratic country, we believe that criticism should not be detrimental to the endeavours of the National Unity Government. The international community should continue to support the efforts of the National Unity Government to bring security, development and prosperity to Afghanistan.

Fifteen months ago, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) assumed full security responsibility for their country. While the current security situation continues to be fragile and the increasing number of civilian causalities is an issue of concern, the ANDSF are resolutely defending their homeland against any threat. We believe that the ANDSF will be more successful, based on this year's experience, while at the same time overcoming its shortcomings.

The parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in October will strengthen and advance democratic institutions and traditions in Afghanistan. To achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan and stability in the region, the successful conclusion of the peace and reconciliation process is vital. We welcome and support recent initiatives to that end, commend the facilitating role played by neighbouring countries in that respect, and stand ready to contribute, if the need arises. I would like to emphasize the following three points in that regard. We hope, first, that all parties will contribute to efforts aimed at strengthening peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and in the region; secondly, that the armed struggle against the Afghan State and people will come to an end; and thirdly, that reconciliation is ensured through negotiations. I would also like to underline that Turkey will continue to support the Afghan Government's struggle against terrorism.

We welcome various initiatives and projects of connectivity and cooperation among neighbouring countries. We believe that those initiatives not only help Afghanistan to achieve a successfully functioning economy, but also play a key role in the realization of major regional infrastructure projects. I would like to reiterate once again that in order to continue to build on the achievements of the past 14 years, the international community's continuing support to Afghanistan during the transformation decade will be of the utmost importance.

Before concluding, I would like to underline that Turkey will continue to support Afghanistan's security and development efforts at the bilateral and multilateral levels and stand by its Afghan brothers as long as Turkey's help is needed.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you very much, Mr. President, and in honour of your presidency this month, I will try to say this in your language. *Obrigado, senhor President*. I thank you for the opportunity to speak at this debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which aligns itself with the statement just made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2016/218) and Special Representative Haysom for his briefing. I also would like to thank my dear friend Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

I will address three issues: first, the security situation and the peace process; secondly, the road to Warsaw and Brussels; and thirdly, the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

On the security situation and the peace process, the report of the Secretary-General states very clearly that the security situation deteriorated even further in 2015. It also indicates a substantial increase in casualties among the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). We commend the efforts of the National Unity Government and the ANDSF in providing security to the Afghan people, but we need to address the critical shortcomings. Continued international support, including by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is needed in strengthening the security forces.

The number of civilian casualties has seen an increase as well, as reported by UNAMA last month. We deplore all casualties, of course. They indicate all the more that a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is urgently needed. Political unity in the Afghan Government will help create stability and a positive perspective for the Afghan people. Durable peace can be achieved only through Afghan-led reconciliation, supported by a regional process. Commendable efforts in that direction have recently been made by Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as within the quadrilateral talks among Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China, which we hope will lead to direct talks with the Taliban. The Netherlands stands ready to support reconciliation efforts, if so desired.

My second point concerns the road to Warsaw and Brussels. The international community, including my country, has been engaged in Afghanistan for over a decade now, in close collaboration with the Afghan Government. Together we have seen some very positive results in terms of development. For example, the service delivery of health care and education has improved drastically since 2001. Women and girls are actively part of social life, and Afghanistan has witnessed a sharp increase in girls enrolling in schools. In addition, the Government of National Unity recently took steps to strengthen protection services for women. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the emergency fund for the medical treatment of female victims of violence that was launched on 31 January by President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. We welcome the extra funding in the State budget for additional prosecution units to address violence against women.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a longtime partner of Afghanistan, having contributed significantly in the fields of security, justice and development. We are committed to fulfilling our part in the longer-term development of Afghanistan. We are currently planning our national post-2016 engagements in the fields of defence, development and diplomacy in the run-up to the NATO Summit in July in Warsaw and the Brussels conference in October. For both conferences, which are very much interlinked, it is crucial that both the Afghan Government and the international community demonstrate their commitment to Afghanistan's future. This applies both to progress for the necessary reforms, on the one hand, and the necessary international support, on the other. The Kingdom of the Netherlands wishes to further work together with Afghanistan and partners within the international community. Our focus will be on the implementations of the reforms as agreed in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework for the further development of Afghanistan.

My third point is on the role of UNAMA. This morning the Council renewed the mandate of UNAMA. I would like to underline the commitment to and the continued support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the role played by UNAMA in Afghanistan, and we thank UNAMA for its continued constructive role in coordinating the international community efforts and in fulfilling its political mandate.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain committed to Afghanistan throughout

the transformation decade in the context of increased Afghan ownership and leadership. In the spirit of partnership, focusing on supporting peace, justice and development, we will continue to support Afghanistan and its people.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.